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SCENE OF THE CRIME



A LITTLE
PIECE OF
GOOD NIGHT

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chapter six

I got the call around 9:30 the next morning.

At first the words didn't connect, like I'd heard them in a foreign language and was waiting for a translation...

Maggie's body had been found in her motel room. My card was among her things.

Sergeant Blythe, the detective in charge, had called the SFPD, and Whitey had vouched for me. Now he wanted to question me about my investigation.

I almost left Knut behind. He had never seemed like a vulture to me until that moment. But I knew I was being unfair. I was really just mad at myself.

Why hadn't I seen this coming?

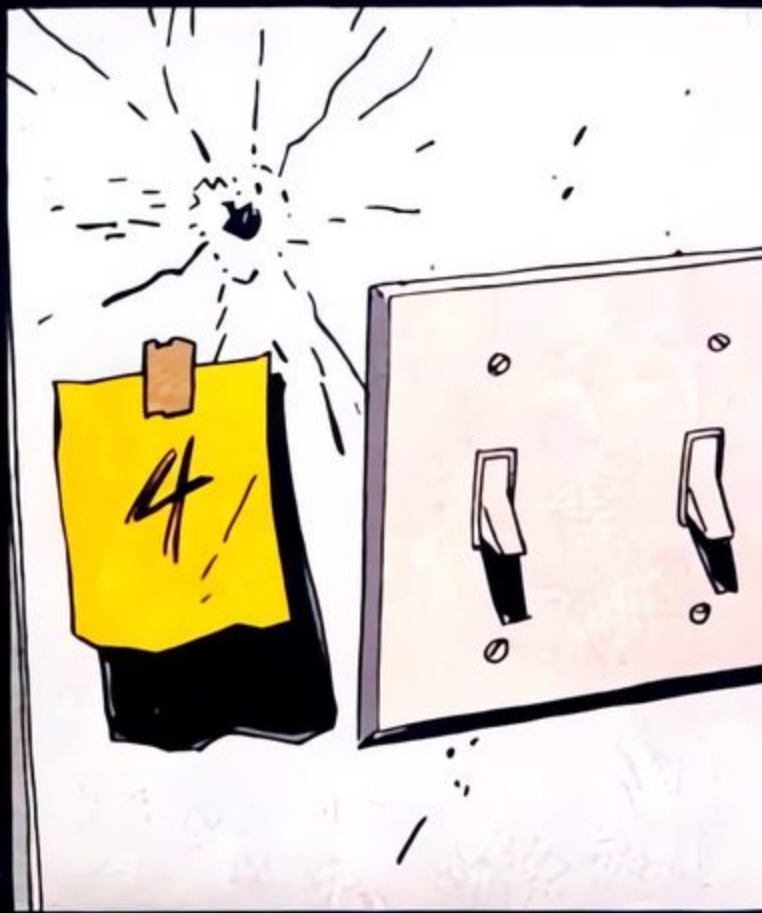
The drive down the coast usually takes about two hours--we made it in a little over one.

Blythe had asked me to come down to his office later that day. He probably didn't want a Private Investigator at his crime scene, but the hell with him.

It felt so wrong. This hadn't been a dangerous case. Maggie was just a confused kid running from her past mistakes.

But maybe her mistakes were bigger than I had figured.

C'MON, ASSHOLE! MOVE AWAY!



A LITTLE PIECE OF GOODNIGHT

p a r t t w o o f f o u r

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Knut got into the room. He could get into just about any place. This was his world, behind the police tape, over the Medical Examiner's shoulder.



These people all knew him well, and if they didn't, then they knew his legend.



Sometimes it helped, being the nephew of the famous crime scene photographer, and the son of Detective Kurt Herriman, the dead hero cop-- got me respect I hadn't always earned.



But nothing was helping me now.

SERGEANT BLYTHE, YOUR UNCLE TOLD ME I COULD FIND YOU OUT HERE.

I WASN'T EXACTLY EXPECTING YOU.

I'LL STAY OUTTA YOUR WAY. WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?



THREE BULLETS IN THE BACK. LOOKS LIKE SHE WAS RUNNING AWAY-- POSSIBLE STRUGGLE. SOMEONE SEARCHED THE ROOM, TOO. BUT YOU SAW ALL THAT.

DID YOU FIND THE GUN? SHE HAD A GUN...



DID SHE? WELL, THANKS FOR THE UPDATE.

LOOK, WHAT'S THE DEAL? WAS SHE YOUR CLIENT?



I filled him in, leaving out the connection to Paul Raymonds, but telling him everything else-- about her sister, Lunarhouse, the rocker dude that decked me, everything.

JESUS CHRIST, WHY THE HELL'D YOU LET HER KEEP THE GUN?

I DON'T KNOW. I JUST DON'T USUALLY TAKE GUNS AWAY FROM PEOPLE. I DON'T USUALLY TOUCH GUNS AT ALL.

REALLY? WELL, THAT ANSWERS MY NEXT QUESTION, I GUESS.





I'M GIVIN' YOU A BREAK HERE, CAUSA' KNUT, BUT YOU KNOW YOU MESSED THIS ONE UP BAD.

YEAH, IT'S BEGINNING TO SINK IN.



ANY CHANCE THE *ROCKER* CAME BACK AND THEY HAD IT OUT?

I DOUBT IT. SHE SAID SHE'D JUST MET HIM LAST NIGHT.

BUT HE DID TRY TO ROB HER.



WELL, THIS WAS DEFINITELY NOT A ROBBERY.

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

BECAUSE SHE HAD OVER TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS IN A SUITCASE IN THE CLOSET.

Blythe wasn't going to give me any more information. But Knut would probably get everything I needed. Anything that wasn't in his pictures, the cops would gladly tell him, probably without even realizing it.



But I couldn't just sit still. There were some things I could find out on my own.

I was in luck, the morning clerk was still there--the one who had found her. And as I figured, he just assumed I was another cop ruining his day.



I NEED A LIST OF OUTGOING PHONE CALLS MADE FROM THAT ROOM LAST NIGHT.

I ALREADY GAVE THAT TO THAT OTHER DUDE, DUDE.

YEAH, I KNOW, BUT NOW I NEED IT, TOO.



There were only three calls on the list. The first one was to Maggie's sister. I had made that call.



But the others were both to Lunarhouse.

CRIME SCENE

chapter seven

Knut told me that the clerk had found Maggie a little after 7:00 a.m. The guy was a bit of a "peeping tom," and he had gotten quite an eyeful this time. Her gun was missing and presumed to be the murder weapon.

The doorknobs, an ashtray, and some random surfaces had been wiped clean of any prints.

The police were assuming the money was somehow connected to a motive, and so was I.

Someone had given Maggie a lot of cash, and maybe that had just been the first payment.

I didn't like the idea of Maggie as a blackmailer. It didn't fit with her sad, smiling eyes. But I had no other explanation for the money or her murder.

I tried to remind myself that she was also incredibly self-destructive, and it was hard to say what she would or wouldn't have done.

MUSEUM of MYSTERY

MAYBE YOU SHOULD COME IN FOR A WHILE, KIDDO. YOU'RE IN NO STATE TO BE LOOKING INTO THIS.

THE COPS'LL TAKE CARE OF IT.

NO, I'LL BE FINE. I JUST WANT TO SORT A FEW THINGS OUT ON MY OWN.

HOPEFULLY, THEY WON'T EVEN KNOW. BUT RIGHT NOW, I JUST FEEL LIKE I SCREWED UP BIG TIME, AND I CAN'T JUST WAIT AROUND FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO FIND OUT WHY.

THEY'RE NOT GONNA LIKE YOU STICKIN' YOUR NOSE IN HERE...

I doubted the cops would have put together the significance of Maggie's phone calls yet, so I thought I might find some of my answers back at LunarHouse.



But I was mistaken.



It looked like Mitchell Luna was a few steps ahead of everyone.



But at least now I could get a look at the 3rd floor they were trying so desperately to protect.



It was an interesting layout for an entire floor of a Victorian house.



And if I wasn't mistaken, all those new outlets and the soil scattered around on the floor added up to one thing: A major grow operation.



Pot was one of the largest cash cows around, thanks to the "War on Drugs." While easier-to-smuggle drugs dropped in cost, pot prices had skyrocketed.

Millions could be made in a room like this.





chapter eight

After trying Alexandra Jordan's number a few times and continuing to get her machine, I realized where she probably was-- in a cold basement in Santa Cruz looking at the empty shell of her sister.

But I needed to talk to her, so I went over anyway and waited around.

she arrived home at 5:30 with an older woman, who I assumed was her mother.

I gave them about fifteen minutes, and then I followed them up.

I didn't like bothering them at a time like this, but it probably wouldn't make much difference. For the next few days, everyone they knew would seem like an intruder.

YES?

I'M HERE TO SEE ALEXANDRA, I'M JACK HERRIMAN...

OH, THE DETECTIVE.

I'M HER MOTHER. I'M AFRAID YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO TALK TO ALEX, SHE TOOK A SLEEPING PILL. SHE'S NOT HOLDING UP SO WELL...

YOU HEARD...ABOUT HER SISTER?

THAT'S WHY I'M HERE... I'D LIKE TO ASK A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT MAGGIE...



IT'S A LITTLE LATE FOR THAT, ISN'T IT? WHAT GOOD CAN YOU DO NOW?

I JUST WANT TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED. I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'LL HELP YOU OR NOT...



YOU WERE HIRED TO FIND MY DAUGHTER, AND WHEN YOU FOUND HER, YOU LEFT HER ALONE IN A MOTEL ROOM... WITH A LOADED GUN.

WHY WOULD I ASK FOR YOUR HELP AGAIN?



LOOK, I LEFT HER THERE BECAUSE SHE SEEMED OKAY. I WASN'T HIRED TO KIDNAP HER.

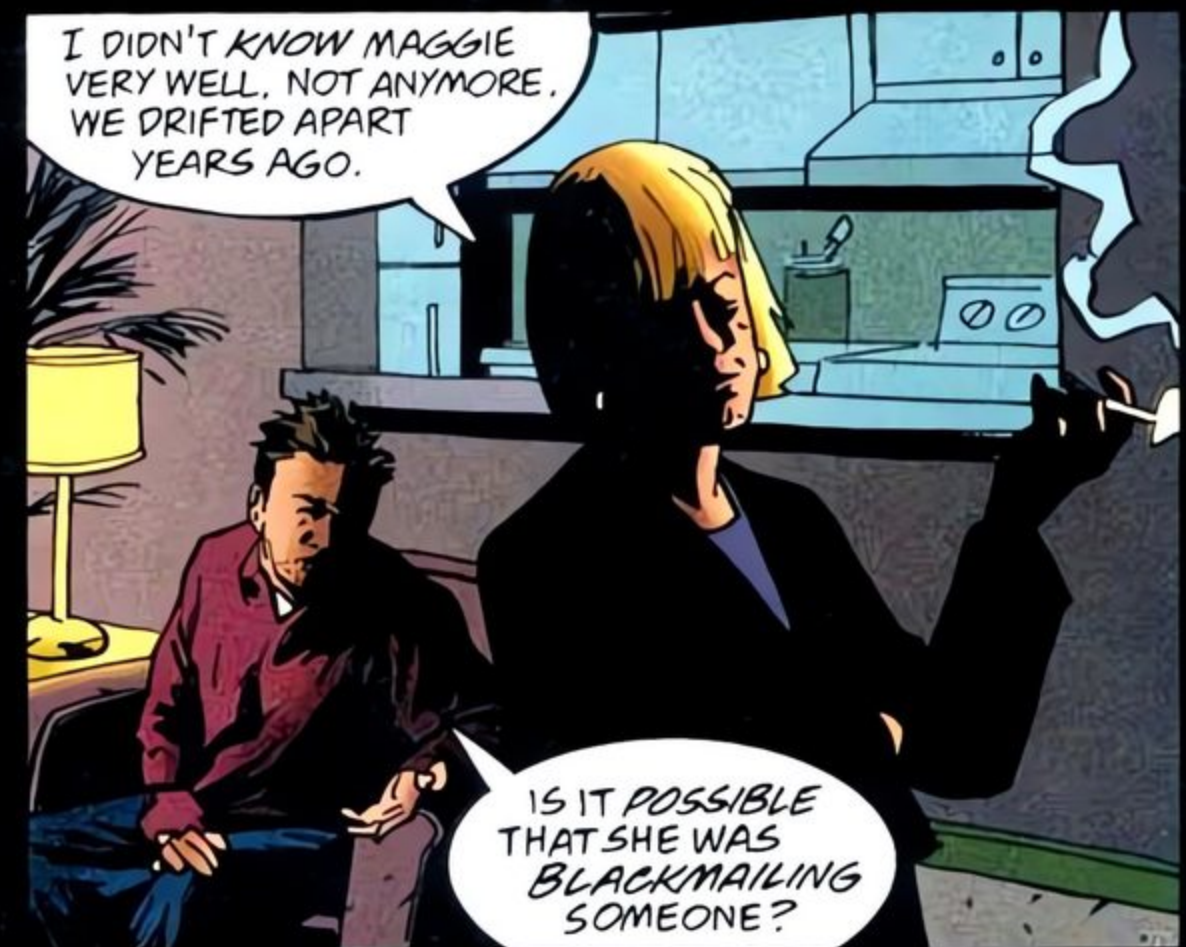
IF ALEX HAD BEEN A LITTLE MORE UP FRONT ABOUT THE FACTS, THEN MAYBE I WOULD HAVE BEEN A LITTLE MORE CAUTIOUS...



I WAS TOLD THIS WAS A SIMPLE JOB.

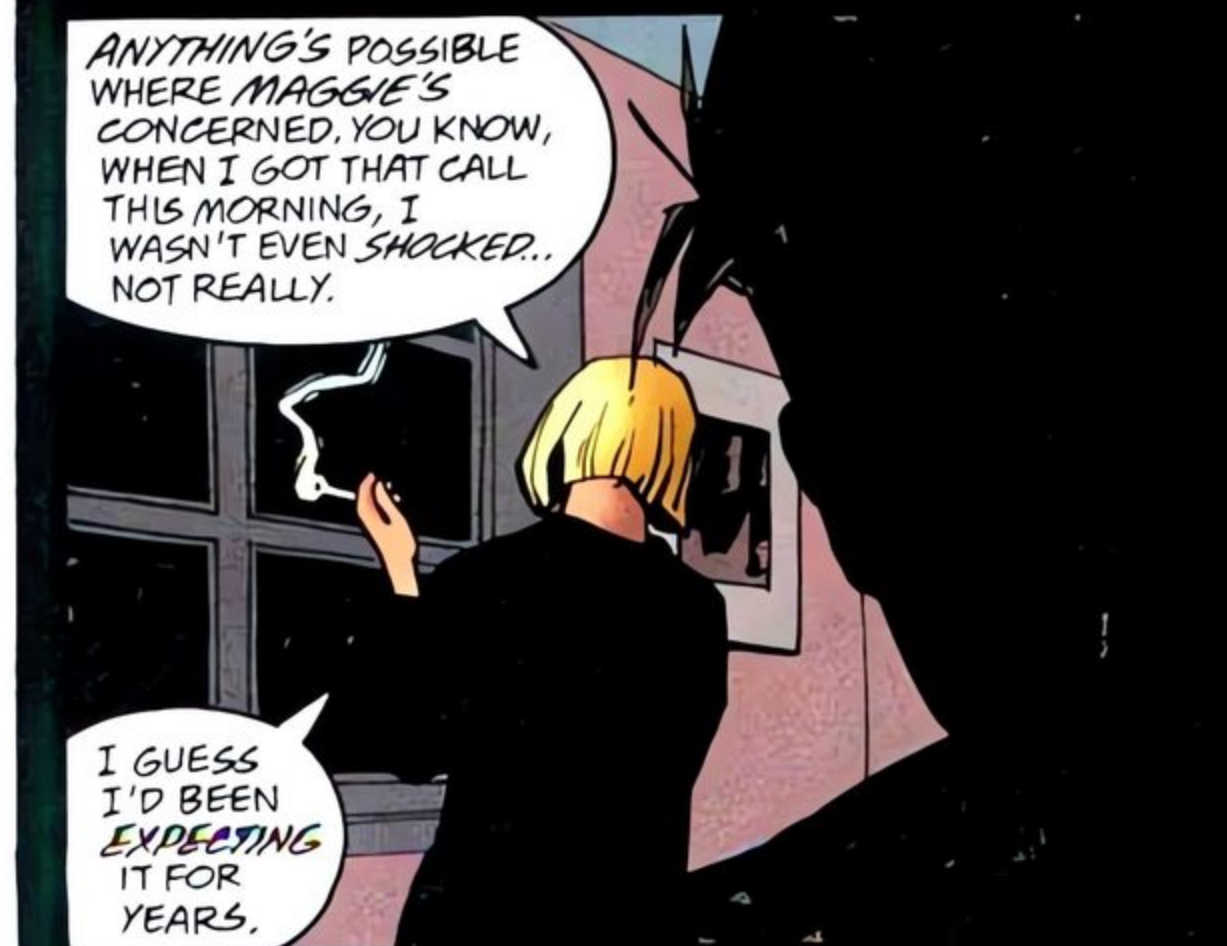
WHAT FACTS?

I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE LIKE WHY MAGGIE WOULD BE CARRYING AROUND TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS IN CASH.



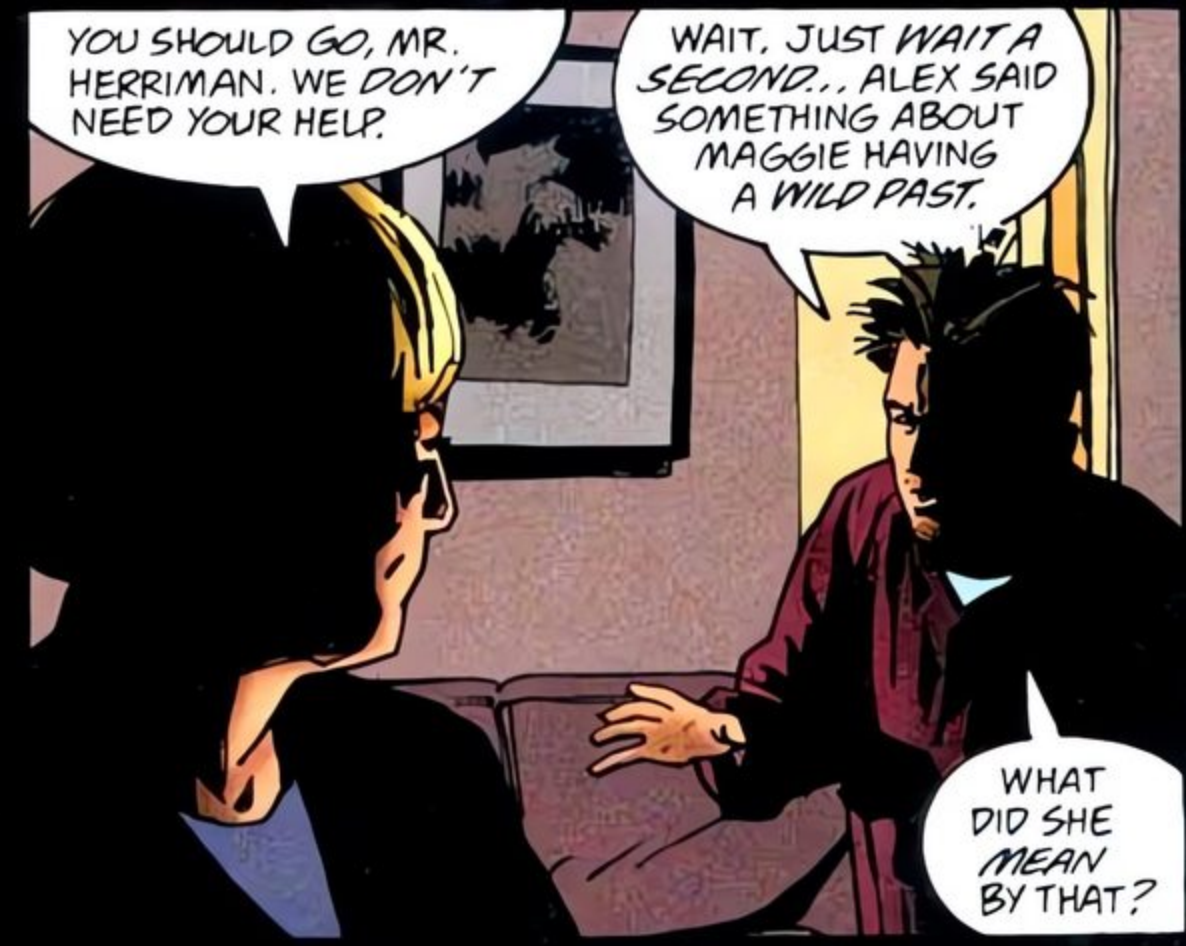
I DIDN'T KNOW MAGGIE VERY WELL. NOT ANYMORE. WE DRIFTED APART YEARS AGO.

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT SHE WAS BLACKMAILING SOMEONE?



ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE WHERE MAGGIE'S CONCERNED. YOU KNOW, WHEN I GOT THAT CALL THIS MORNING, I WASN'T EVEN SHOCKED... NOT REALLY.

I GUESS I'D BEEN EXPECTING IT FOR YEARS.



YOU SHOULD GO, MR. HERRIMAN. WE DON'T NEED YOUR HELP.

WAIT, JUST WAIT A SECOND... ALEX SAID SOMETHING ABOUT MAGGIE HAVING A WILD PAST.

WHAT DID SHE MEAN BY THAT?



chapter nine

I'd spent far too much time in courthouses and police stations while growing up to ever be comfortable in them now. I was always overcome with a fear that I wouldn't be allowed to leave--that I'd be put away for a crime only just discovered...

--Though long buried in my past.

Whitey had come up with some noteworthy items. Maggie Jordan had been arrested as a teenager for arson, possession of drugs, and even once for prostitution.

JESUS... SHE MUST'VE BEEN A NIGHTMARE.

As an adult she'd had a few busts for pot and coke, but nothing major. And certainly nothing that seemed to suggest a sudden leap to blackmail.

Technically her juvenile records were SEALED, but there was never a confidential file that Whitey couldn't access.

A patrolman until his back was broken in an accident a few years ago, he was now the best information tracker that the SFPD had. He followed a paper trail like a bloodhound.

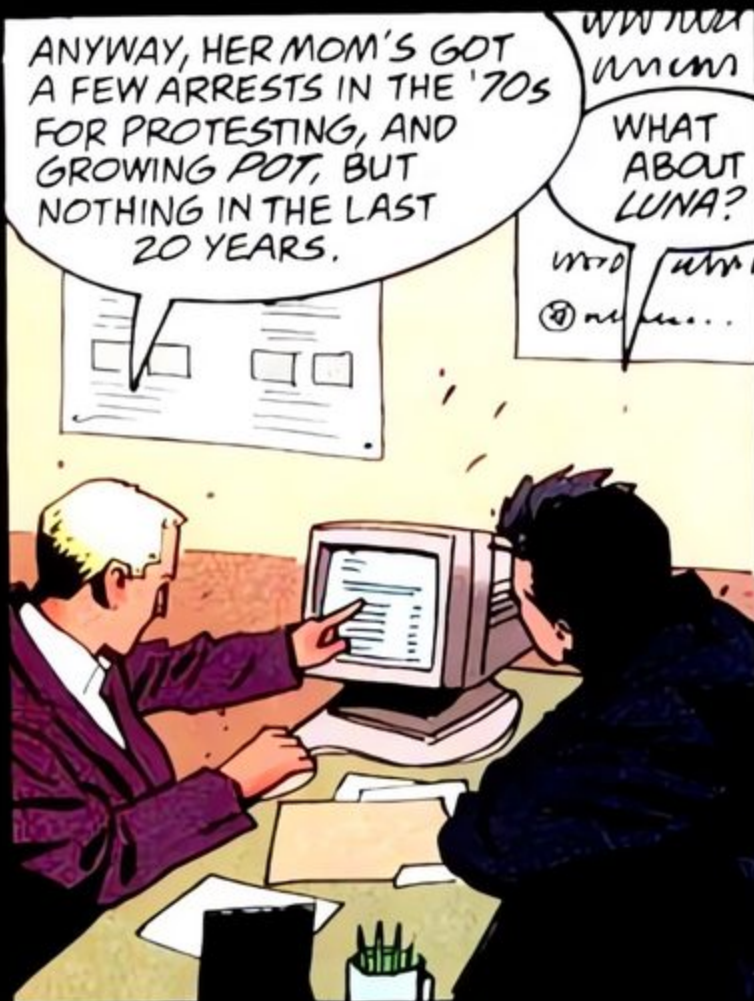
NOW, HERE'S AN INTERESTING TIDBIT: IN '92 ALEXANDRA JORDAN WAS ARRESTED FOR STABBING HER MOTHER, MINOR WOUNDS INFLICTED, APPARENTLY, AND SHE GOT OFF WITH JUST PROBATION.

YOU'RE KIDDING...

I SHIT YOU NOT. BUT OTHER THAN THE ONE "PSYCHO" IMITATION, SHE'S CLEAN.

MAYBE I SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL NEXT TIME I QUESTION HER.

JUST DON'T INTER-ROGATE HER WHILE SHE'S COOKING.



ANYWAY, HER MOM'S GOT A FEW ARRESTS IN THE '70S FOR PROTESTING, AND GROWING POT, BUT NOTHING IN THE LAST 20 YEARS.

WHAT ABOUT LUNA?



NADA, ZILCH. HE'S BEEN QUESTIONED TWICE IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS ABOUT POSSIBLE UNDERAGE SEX STUFF, BUT NOTHING ELSE. NOT EVEN A TRAFFIC TICKET.



SHIT. WELL, KEEP ME POSTED IF YOU FIND ANYTHING ELSE... YOU SEEN RAYMONDS AROUND TONIGHT?

YEAH, HE SHOULD BE AROUND SOMEWHERE TRY THE SMOKING ROOM.



I found him at target practice, which was awkward, but at least it was a private enough place to have a personal conversation.

YOU SET ME UP, DIDN'T YOU?



WHAT?! IS THAT A JOKE?

YEAH, SOME JOKE. YOU SEND YOUR GIRLFRIEND TO ME TO FIND HER SISTER. THEN HER SISTER WINDS UP DEAD THE NEXT DAY WITH A SUITCASE FULL OF CASH.

GOD THOSE CRUZ COPS SURE KNOW HOW TO KEEP A LID ON THINGS.



GET TO THE PART WHERE I SET YOU UP.

YOU HAD TA KNOW MAGGIE WAS INTO SOMETHING FUCKED-UP. WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST TELL ME?!

I DIDN'T KNOW SHIT. ALEX JUST WANTED TO KEEP THE POLICE OUT OF IT, WHICH WAS FINE BY ME.



YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE MONEY?

I WAS AS SURPRISED AS YOU. ALEX SAYS SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM EITHER.

SO WHATTA YOU FIGURE? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GIRL?



I told him everything about the past two days, and that it seemed like maybe Maggie could have been blackmailing Luna for any number of reasons--

--but SOMETHING about that just didn't feel right.

YEAH, WELL THAT'S GOOD
INSTINCTS. A YOUNG GIRL
DOESN'T USUALLY BLACK-
MAIL SOMEONE ON HER
OWN. IF THAT'S WHAT
HAPPENED, SHE MIGHT'VE
HAD A PARTNER, SOME-
ONE ELSE OUT AT
LUNARHOUSE.

LOOK, JACK, I DIDN'T SET YOU UP.
I JUST DIDN'T WANT IT GETTING
AROUND THE STATION... ABOUT ALEX, I
WANTED TO KEEP THIS IN THE FAMILY,
THAT'S ALL.

ONE BIG
HAPPY FAMILY...
WHERE YOU'RE
CHEATING ON AUNT
LESLIE. GREAT.

ALWAYS SO FUCKING
QUICK TO JUDGE ME. IT'S
NOT THAT BIG A DEAL,
JACK. WE'LL
SURVIVE IT.

SURE.
WE'RE ALL
REAL GOOD
AT SURVIVING.

YOU
GONNA KEEP
LOOKING INTO
THIS CASE?

YOU SHOULD'A
BEEN A COP. YOU'RE
JUST LIKE YOUR
DAD.

I COULD'VE
HELPED HER, AND
NOW SHE'S DEAD.
YEAH, I'M GONNA
KEEP LOOKING
INTO IT.

YEAH, YOU GUYS
NEED MORE COPS
WHO ARE AFRAID
TO SHOOT PEOPLE.

CALL ME IF
YOU NEED A
HEADS UP.

chapter ten

I dropped the car off at home and walked over to Chinatown to meet my other source of information.

In the old days, this had been our hangout. I liked it because they never remembered you, so you never felt like too much of a regular.

I was just another white guy here, and all they cared about was my money. It was an honesty that I respected.

I'd known Steve Ellington since high school, and we had gone through a lot of craziness together.

EXIT

JACKO!

HEY, LIPO, SCOTCH-- A DOUBLE.

JESUS, MAN, YOU KNOW THERE'S NO LIPO,

When I had applied for my P.I.'s license, Steve decided he would, too, insisting that he deserved to be a private eye FAR MORE than me...

...And he was right.

Now Steve was the kind of detective that Hammett used to be-- a real operative working for an international firm-- and of the two of us, he was probably the better P.I.

Years ago, he'd taken me on a walking tour of Dashiell Hammett's Chinatown, re-making those dark alleys into the opium dens and speakeasies that his hero knew so well.

Repair TV

But the good part of that reality was that the private information sector usually knows a lot more than the police, and Steve could get his hands on stuff I could only dream of.

LUNA SHOWED UP IN THE BAY AREA IN EARLY '97. PREVIOUSLY HE'D STARTED LUNAR HOUSE IN L.A. AND HEADED FOR S.F. AROUND THE TIME ALL THOSE IDIOTS COMMITTED SUICIDE IN SAN DIEGO.

WE'VE HAD HIM UNDER SURVEILLANCE A TON OVER THE YEARS, MOSTLY FOR RUNAWAYS. THE BIG SUSPICION IS THAT HE'S MAKING MOST OF HIS MONEY EITHER GROWING OR TRAFFICKING WEED.

I'D SAY GROWING FROM WHAT I SAW. WHAT ABOUT BEFORE L.A.?

IT TURNS OUT WE HAD QUITE A FILE ON THE LUNAR-HOUSE, AFTER ALL.

GREAT. WHATTA YA GOT?

HE WAS IN MEXICO UNTIL THE EARLY '90S. BUT THAT'S ALL WE KNOW. BIRTH CERTIFICATE SAYS HE WAS BORN IN FRESNO IN '50.

BUT THE PLACE IS LOCKED UP TIGHT. COULD BE KINDA TOUGH GETTIN' IN, BUT I THINK WE CAN PULL IT OFF.

IF THEY'VE DROPPED OUT OF THEIR PLACE IN THE CITY, THEN THEY'RE PROBABLY OUT AT THE COMMUNE IN SANTA ROSA. THEY OWN THIRTEEN ACRES OUT THERE.

I JUST WANT TO TALK TO THE GUY FOR A FEW MINUTES. I DON'T THINK WE NEED TO BREAK IN FOR THAT.

IF THEY SPLIT TOWN AFTER YOUR LAST VISIT, YOU REALLY THINK THEY'RE GONNA MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR YOU?

MAYBE NOT, BUT WHY ARE YOU GOING ALONG?

BECAUSE OF THIS... JUSTIN AND JASON PULLWALTER. BOTH DONE TIME FOR ARMED ROBBERY AND ATTEMPTED MURDER, AMONG OTHER THINGS. THESE ARE LUNA'S MAIN MEN.

YOU NEED A BODY-GUARD, JACKO.



It would've been funny if it wasn't true. But at 5'9" and 130 pounds, Steve was still one of the most dangerous guys I knew.

It was part of what made him a good detective. He was never shy about kicking in a door or breaking someone's nose when they weren't expecting it.



ANY CHANCE ONE OF THESE PULLWALTERS DECIDED TO MILK LUNA FOR SOME CASH, AND GOT MAGGIE IN ON THE DEAL?

TO BLACK-MAIL HIM WITHOUT EVEN LETTING HIM KNOW THEY WERE DOING IT?



I DOUBT THEY'D BE SMART ENOUGH, BUT YOU NEVER CAN TELL. CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK AND ALL THAT.

HERE... DRINK UP.



GOD, I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU DRINKIN' IN... WHAT, TWO YEARS? LONGER?

I STILL HAVE ONE ONCE IN A WHILE... JUST NOT LIKE BEFORE.

YOU MUST BE PRETTY FUCKED UP ABOUT THIS GIRL MAGGIE.



I JUST FEEL HELPLESS.

I HATE THAT...



YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN HER. MAN, SHE WAS REALLY SOMETHIN'...



SHE HAD THAT KIND OF FRAGILE BEAUTY, Y'KNOW? LIKE THE WORLD HAD HIT HER TOO HARD, BUT SHE WASN'T GIVING UP.

SHE WAS TOUGH UNDERNEATH IT ALL. MAYBE TOO TOUGH. MAYBE THAT'S WHY SHE PUNISHED HERSELF... CAUSE SHE KNEW SHE COULD SURVIVE.



SOUNDS FAMILIAR.

SO, WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?



WE'RE GONNA TRY TO GET INTO THAT LUNARHOUSE COMPOUND TOMORROW, BUT TONIGHT WE'RE GONNA GET DRUNK.



HEY, Y'KNOW... I SAW GWEN A FEW WEEKS AGO.

I THOUGHT SHE WAS IN SEATTLE?

I GUESS SHE MOVED BACK. SHE WAS WORKING OVER AT LUCY'S PLACE... WAITRESSING.



JESUS... WELL, AT LEAST SHE'S NOT STRIPPING ANYMORE.



OH, YEAH. SHE COULDN'T STOP TALKING ABOUT YOU!

HOW MUCH SHE MISSED YOU...

SO... DID SHE ASK ABOUT ME?



FUCK OFF.



ACTUALLY, SHE WOULDN'T EVEN TALK TO ME... I ALWAYS THOUGHT SHE LIKED ME.

OH, RIGHT. SHE FUCKING HATED YOU.

I THOUGHT THAT WAS JUST AN ACT.



chapter eleven

I think I would have gone anyway, but I'll blame the alcohol.

LUGY'S
DINER

HI.

YOU'RE DRUNK.

JUST A LITTLE...

I THOUGHT YOU QUIT ALL THAT?

THAT'S RIGHT, I DID... BUT IT'S BEEN KIND OF A BAD WEEK...

AM I SUPPOSED TO CARE? IS THAT IT?

NO, WAIT! WAIT UP!

WAIT UP, WOULD YA?

WHAT? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY?

I KNOW YOU HATE ME, I KNOW THAT... I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW...

SCRASH!

OH, GODDAMMIT!



ARE YOU
OKAY?

YEAH...
YEAH...

I JUST...
FEEL
TERRIBLE...
I NEVER
EXPLAINED
WHY... I
DIDN'T...



YOU
FUCKER!

FUCKER!!

HEY!



JUST WALK UP
AND TRY TO APOLOGIZE.
IS THAT AS EASY
AS WALKIN' AWAY?

BUT
YOU DON'T
UNDER-
STAND...
IT HAD
NOTHING
TO DO WITH
YOU.



THAT'S
WHAT YOU
THINK.

GOD, YOU
FUCKING
ASSHOLE.



SEE THAT HE
GETS HOME.
PLEASE.



I had never hurt someone so
much in my life. For four and a
half years-- drunk and sober, on
junk and off, working and un-
employed-- we'd stayed together.

But a secret had
built a wall between
us, and weighed me
down, and ultimately
ripped my life apart.
I had deserted her
then.

Which was
unforgivable.



All I wanted now was a big glass of water, some aspirin, and a few multivitamins--to prevent what was sure to be a MAJOR hangover. Then I wanted to sleep forever.

Just forget Maggie and Gwen and all my other mistakes.



JACKIE, YOU OKAY?

WE'VE BEEN WAITIN' UP FOR YA'... YOU DRUNK?

I GUESS. SORRY.



HEY, IT'S OKAY... I'LL MAKE YOU A CUP OF COFFEE.

NO. WATER... PLEASE. WATER.

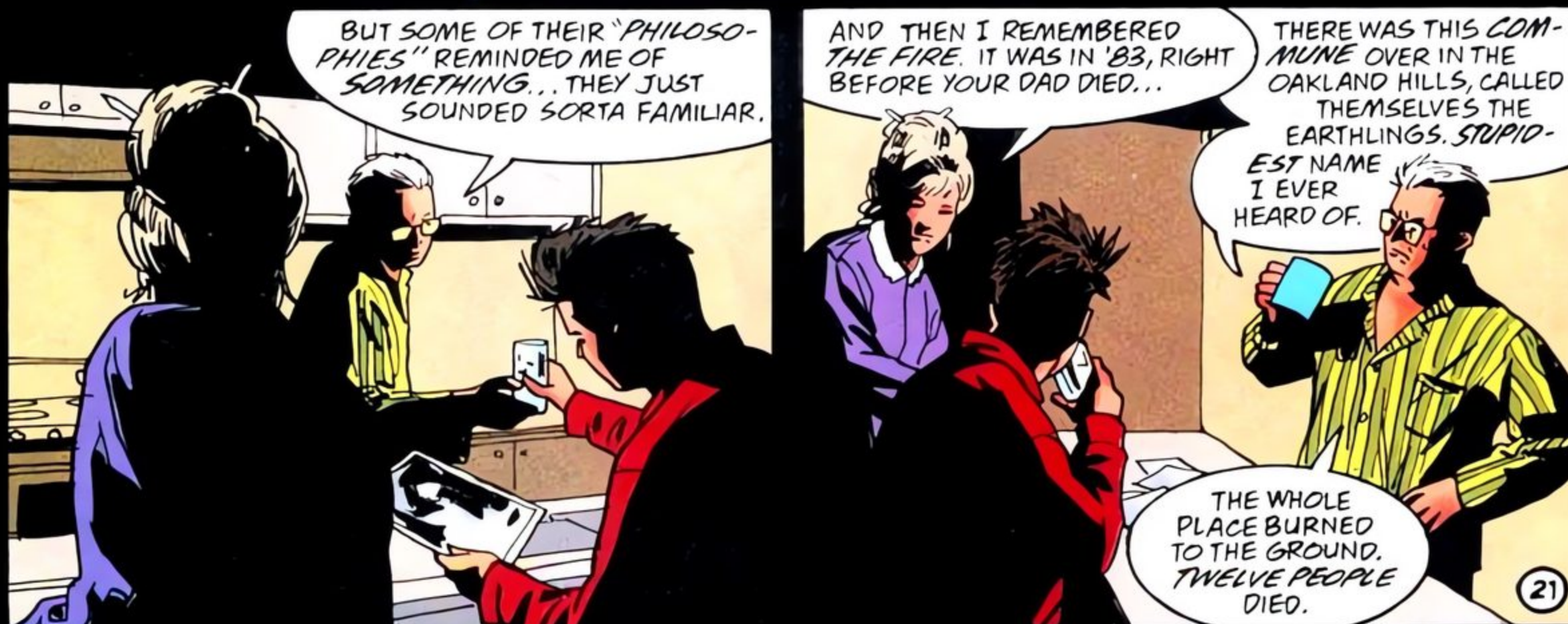


WHAT'S ALL THIS? ISN'T THIS THAT FIRE IN THE GALLERY?

YEAH, IT'S FROM THE SAME FIRE. THAT'S WHAT WE WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT.

WE GOT TA'LOOKIN' AT THOSE PAM-PHLETS YOU LEFT HERE ABOUT LUNARHOUSE...

ALL THEIR GARBAGE ABOUT ORGASMS BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO A HIGHER STATE OF EXISTENCE, LIKE LSD... ANY 14-YEAR-OLD BOY COULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT.



BUT SOME OF THEIR "PHILOSOPHIES" REMINDED ME OF SOMETHING... THEY JUST SOUNDED SORTA FAMILIAR.

AND THEN I REMEMBERED THE FIRE. IT WAS IN '83, RIGHT BEFORE YOUR DAD DIED...

THERE WAS THIS COMMUNE OVER IN THE OAKLAND HILLS, CALLED THEMSELVES THE EARTHLINGS. STUPID-EST NAME I EVER HEARD OF.

THE WHOLE PLACE BURNED TO THE GROUND. TWELVE PEOPLE DIED.

IT WAS A REAL BIG DEAL IN THE PAPERS FOR A WHILE AFTER THAT. LOTS OF STUFF ABOUT THE GUY THAT RAN THE PLACE, VIRGIL PETERSON, LIKED TO CALL HIMSELF "PURPLE VIRGIL."

HIS BIG THING WAS TELLING PEOPLE THEY NEEDED TO GET LAID. HE WAS SOME KINDA SEX GURU, AND THAT LUNARHOUSE CRAP SOUNDS LIKE IT COULDA COME RIGHT OUTTA HIS MOUTH.

SO I DUG OUT MY FILES AND FOUND PART OF THE POLICE REPORT. LOOK AT THIS...

WHAT AM I LOOKING--

OH SHIT.

THIS MIGHT HELP TOO. ANYONE LOOK FAMILIAR?

There they were, standing in the ashes of the fire. Hard to recognize at a distance of fifteen years...

But if I needed any reassurance, their names were right there on the police report as survivors: Suzanne, Alexandra, and Margaret Jordan.

And the other surprise was the name of the corpse at their feet.

to be continued

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